

Oct 27, 2011

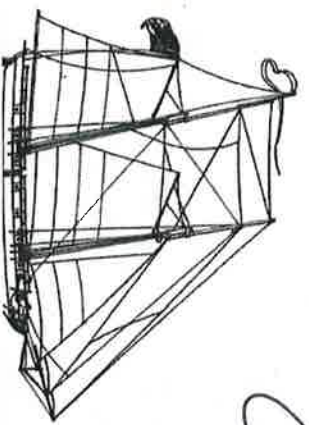
Oil-Florida Keys

Sea Heritage Journal

VOL. 21 NO. 4

Summer 2011

USS SHARK



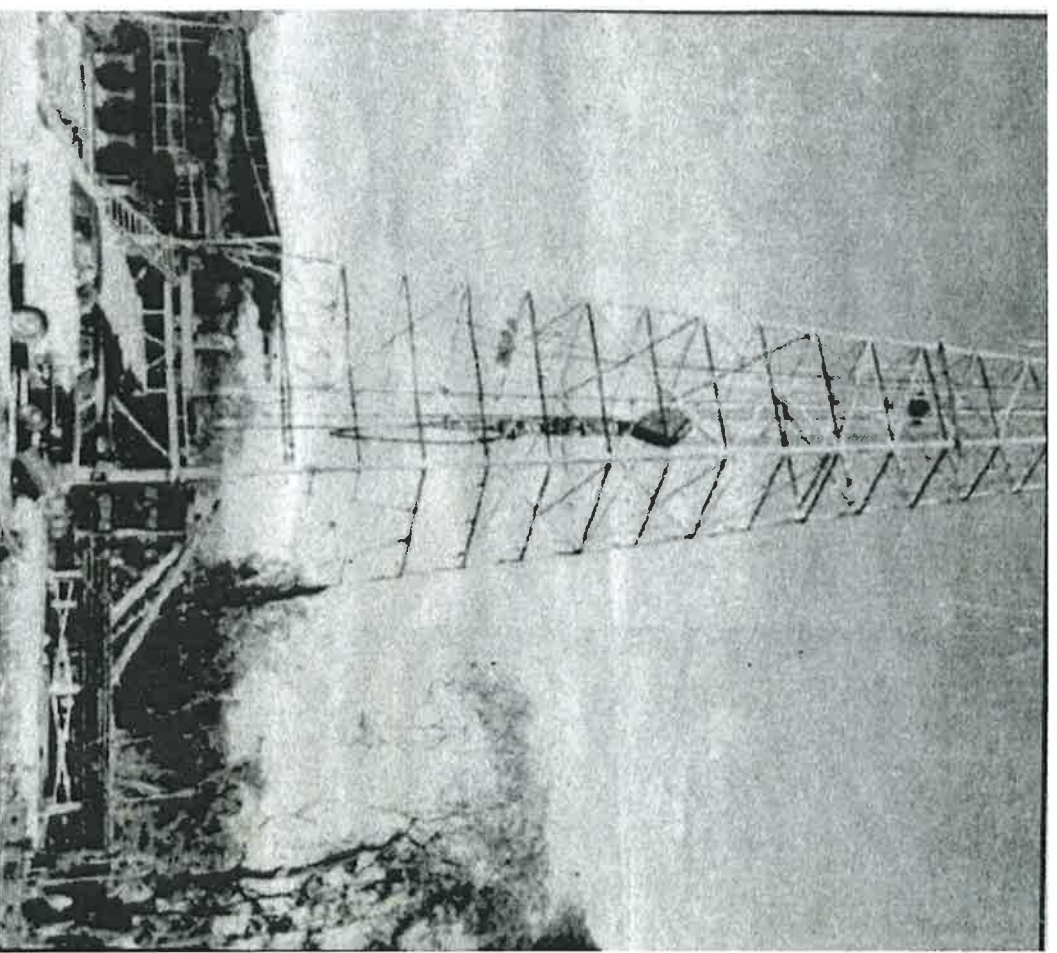
OFFICIAL QUARTERLY PUBLICATION OF THE KEY WEST MARITIME HISTORICAL SOCIETY

Oil and Gas Exploration in the Florida Keys

By J. Gregory Griffin
Copyright 2011

In 1938 Thomas Kenny had a contract for bridge and road repair on Bahia Honda Key. In the process of blasting in preparation for leveling the road, a large piece of rock was thrown out of the ground, and the excavation was almost immediately filled with oil. He reported his findings to the Overseas Road and Toll Bridge District Commission on January eighth. An examination of the land was made and compared to the soil found in the oil producing areas in Texas and Louisiana. Extensive surveys, geologists, and seismic tests followed with great expectation. This was the first direct evidence of the possibility of petroleum in the Florida Keys. Subsequently, fourteen exploratory oil wells were drilled in the Keys beginning around the time oil was discovered at the Sunniland Field in 1943 in Collier County.

The Second World War ended in 1945 with the total victory of the Allies over the Axis powers of Germany and Japan. Oil, in all its forms, was an indispensable product to the Allied forces around the world. Refinement of oil yielded tarmac for runways, toluene (the chief component of



Big Pine Key oil well in 1959. Photo credit: Pat Parks.

TNT) for bombs, synthetic rubber for tires, gasoline (particularly at 100-octane levels) for trucks, tanks, jeeps, and airplanes, and lubricant oil for guns and machinery. The War could not have been won without plentiful quantities of oil. With peace came the desire

(Continued on page 3)